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Dear Friend:

OSTEOPOROSIS, or “porous bone,” is a major public health threat for 28 million Americans, 80% of whom are women. Characterized by low bone mass and structural deterioration of bone tissue, this disease leads to bone fragility and increased susceptibility to hip, spine, and wrist fractures. While osteoporosis is often thought of as an older person’s disease, it can strike at any age.

Osteoporosis is often called the “silent disease” because bone loss occurs without symptoms. People may not know that they have osteoporosis until their bones become so weak that a sudden strain, bump, or fall causes a bone to fracture or a vertebra to collapse. Collapsed vertebra may initially be felt or seen in the form of severe back pain, loss of height, or spinal deformities such as stooped posture or “dowager’s hump.”

I have put together the following information to help you understand the risk factors and prevention techniques that may help you to avoid osteoporosis.

For more information on measures relating to health issues, please call my District Office.



Sincerely,

Fran Pavley

Fran Pavley
Assemblymember, 41st District

Osteoporosis
the best
prevention is
early detection



How can I tell the health of my bones?

It is important to understand that bone is not just a hard and lifeless material; it is, in fact, a complex living tissue. Our bones provide structural support for muscles, protect vital organs, and store the calcium necessary for bone density and strength.

Because bones are constantly changing, they can heal and may be affected by diet and exercise. Until the age of about 35, you build and store bone effectively. Then, as part of the natural aging process, your bones begin to break down faster than new bone can be formed. In women, this bone loss accelerates greatly after menopause, when your ovaries stop producing estrogen, the hormone that protects against bone loss.

Think of your bones as a savings account. There is only as much bone mass in your “account” as you deposit. The critical years for building bone mass are from prior to adolescence until about age 30. Some experts believe that young women can increase their bone mass by as much as 20% — a critical factor in protecting against osteoporosis. It is never too late, however, to begin taking care of your bones.

What are common risk factors in contracting osteoporosis?

There are many factors that determine who will develop osteoporosis. The first step in prevention is to determine whether you are at risk. The most common risk factors are:

- Being female;
- Having a thin or small frame;
- Advanced age;
- A family history of osteoporosis;
- Early menopause;
- Abnormal absence of menstrual periods (amenorrhea);
- Anorexia nervosa or bulimia;
- A diet low in calcium;
- Use of certain medications, such as corticosteroids and anticonvulsants;
- Low testosterone levels in men;
- An inactive lifestyle;
- Cigarette smoking;
- Excessive use of alcohol;
- Being Caucasian or Asian (although African Americans and Latinos are also at risk).

Women lose up to 20% of their bone mass in the 5-7 years following menopause, making them more susceptible to osteoporosis. However, 2 million men are affected by osteoporosis, and 1 out of 8 men age 50 or older will develop fractures.

How can I find out whether or not I have osteoporosis?

Bone Mineral Density Tests (BMD Tests), can measure your bone density in various sites of the body. A bone density test can:

- Detect osteoporosis before a fracture occurs;
- Predict your chances of fracturing your bones in the future;
- Determine your rate of bone loss;
- Monitor the effects of any treatment you may be receiving.

Is there a cure for osteoporosis?

Unfortunately, there is no cure for osteoporosis. However, there are a number of treatments available to help stop further bone loss and fractures:

- Studies have shown that estrogen can prevent the loss of bone mass in postmenopausal women;
- Alendronate, a bisphosphate has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment of postmenopausal osteoporosis;
- Calcitonin is a treatment that can be used by women and men for osteoporosis. It has been shown to slow bone breakdown and may reduce the pain associated with osteoporitic fractures.



How can I prevent osteoporosis?

Building strong bones, especially before the age of 35, can be the best defense against developing osteoporosis, and a healthy lifestyle can be critically important for keeping bones strong.

So, to help prevent osteoporosis:

- Eat a balanced diet rich in calcium;
- Exercise regularly and make sure that you include weight-bearing activities in your exercise routine;
- Don't smoke, and limit your alcohol intake;
- Talk to your doctor if you have a history of osteoporosis in your family or no longer have the protective benefit of estrogen due to natural or surgically induced menopause.

Should I speak with my doctor?

Speaking with your doctor about osteoporosis will help you better understand your own risk for the disease, as well as available treatment options.

Listed below are several questions that are intended to help you discuss osteoporosis with your doctor:

- Based on my lifestyle, medical history, and family background, am I at risk for osteoporosis?
- How do I know if someone in my family suffered from osteoporosis?
- What physical symptoms should I be looking for?
- Am I currently taking any medications that put me in a higher risk group for developing osteoporosis?
- How do I best prevent (or treat) osteoporosis?
- How do I know if my bone density is low?
- How much calcium is right for me? How should I be getting this calcium?
- Do I need to exercise? What kind of exercise is best for me? How often should I exercise?
- How do I know if I have a fractured bone in my spine?

National Osteoporosis Resource Information

Osteoporosis & Related Bone Disease National Resource Center

1150 17th Street NW, #500
Washington, DC 20036
(800) 624-2663
www.osteoporosis.org



National Institute on Aging Information Center

P.O. Box 8057
Gaithersburg, MD 20898
(800) 222-2225
www.nih.gov/nia



National Women's Health Network

514 10th Street NW, #400
Washington, DC 20004
(202) 628-7814



Foundation For Osteoporosis Research and Education

www.FORE.org



National Osteoporosis Foundation

www.nof.org